

# Tom Hilborn

August 19, 1949 - February 17, 2024

To say that Tom Hilborn was a dedicated volunteer is to state the obvious. For more than 50 years he was a constant presence with the Preston Figure Skating Club, acting as the club's treasurer and building all the props for their annual Ice Show.

Preston's ice show was no ordinary show. Not only did it feature skaters from the club, which included some of the best skaters in the world, but the show was staged and looked like it was done by professionals.

As a result, it was not only the highlight of the end of the season for most of the skaters, but was an eagerly anticipated annual event for the entire community.

The show owed much of its success to Hilborn, who served as its Technical Director, a show that toured the country and entertained fans Canada-wide.

When Hilborn was nominated for the Cambridge Sports Hall of Fame by the Preston club, the nomination, including Skate Canada Hall of Famer and former Preston coach Kerry Leitch.

His tenure with the figure skating club is almost unmatched.

"In today's society, very few people can say they were part of a club for that long," said the Preston Club president. "His impact with the Club will never be forgotten."

Hilborn died February 17, 2024.

In his half-century with the club he volunteered his time assisting with ranging from being a music player when he was a teenager, to being the club's Treasurer in later years.

His true passion shone through each year as he helped create and build props upon props for the annual ice shows. Every year he spent countless hours constructing the props.

"It was always amazing to see these props come to 'life.'"

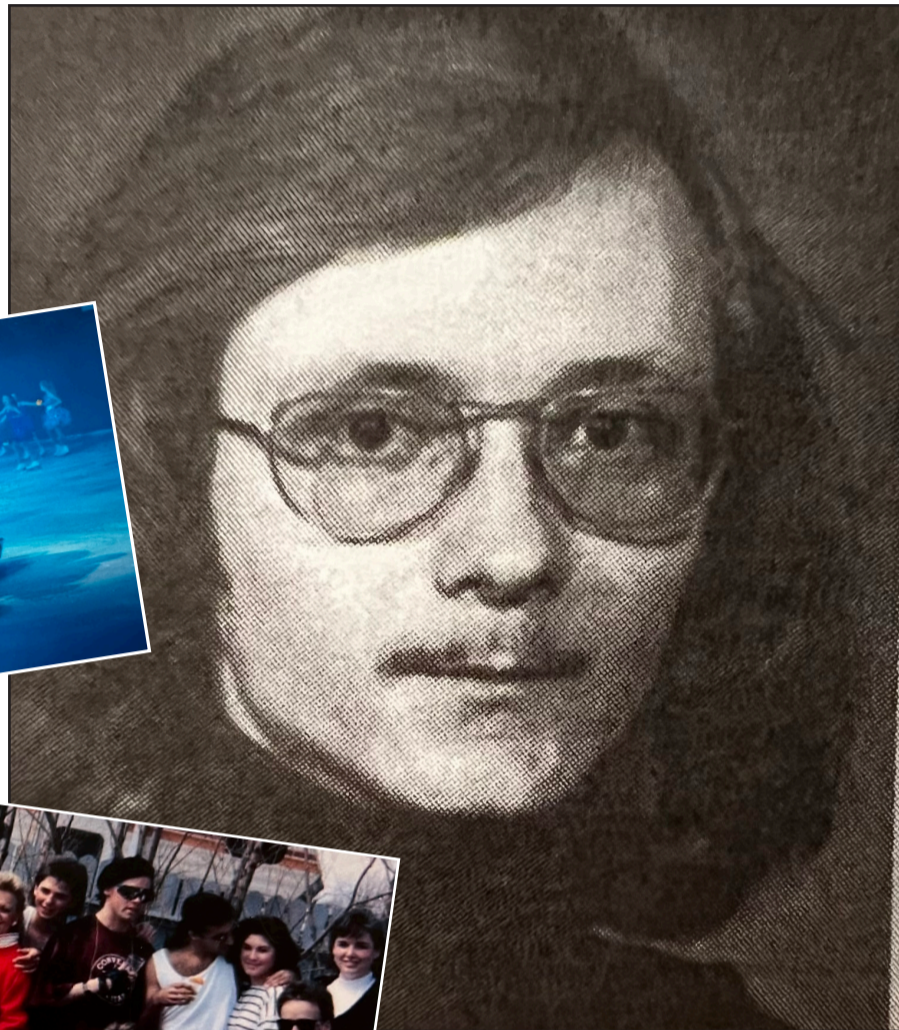
Preston skater and coach Kevin Wheeler called Tom his friend "and my teacher of what really can be done if you believe in children."

Hilborn did it all. "... he did music editing from reel to reel to making magic movie films for the show and playing solo music for all the sessions he made possible in the Preston Arena and in other arenas, including Maple Leaf Gardens; he was the lead stage manager in the Champions On Ice Tours that covered all of Canada twice; he introduced ice ramps as well as vinyl ramps and flaming hoops on the ends of the slides. The kids still use the vinyl ramps every year in the show. He made helicopters fly, and boats sail, as well as making a cat pop out of a moving hat. He made water fountains, waterfalls and water come from the ceiling. He made smoke come out of multiple locations and the cars he helped build each year have amazed audiences for decades. We all know him as the 'prop shed master' but to me he was the man that took our imaginations and made it possible."

He never once said "No, that isn't possible," but neither did he ever compromise safety. "The swings and flying harnesses always got Tom's extra attention and I would never start a show until Tom told me everything was safe."

He was respected by all, and left a lasting imprint on everyone at the club about what volunteering was all about. He set a benchmark that continues.

When the Preston FSC celebrated its 60th Ice Show, one of the highlights was seeing so many alumni return from far and wide. Throughout the weekend, many had the opportunity to chat with Tom and walk down memory lane! Everyone had a story to tell about Tom.



Leitch, a member of the Cambridge Sports Hall of Fame, had a unique relationship with Hilborn. If Leitch was known to always reach for the stars, Hilborn tried to do it on a "shoestring" budget. Together they pushed the envelope and created the "best amateur ice show" in the nation, giving the community, and fans across the some of the most eye-dropping, "explosive" props

country, a local community has ever seen.

When Tom Hilborn's health failed and he was at the hospice, not only did many of the PFSC members drop by to see him, but so too did many of the Alumni. It was a testament to how special Tom Hilborn was to the PFSC community.

"We all enjoyed sitting with him and chatting about the good old PFSC times. His love for the club and the community he helped build will always be remembered."

All those years ago when Leitch hired Tom, then a young high-schooler (in the mid-1960s) to play music for the club in the old Preston Auditorium before the fire destroyed the rink, little did he know what a journey together their lives would take.

"Tom had an unbelievable work ethic and in his ever quiet manner embedded himself in a life dedicated to the success of the Preston Figure Skating Club."

Not long after starting with the club, he was voted onto the Board of Directors. The club was widely acclaimed and received national recognition, with reviews quick to recognize the talents of the skating team and the wonderful props and special effects that led to the many standing ovations the show received.

This led to the Preston Ice Show team being selected to produce a Canadian wide tour traveling from coast to coast and entertaining figure skating fans throughout the country. Tom was its Technical Director.

Thanks in large part to his efforts, this small Ontario community's name became a household name in the world of figure skating. "He was the Preston Figure Skating Club," said Leitch, who also epitomized the club.

"Tom Hilborn's dedication and unique talent is everything that the Cambridge Sports Hall of Fame represents."

Inducted 2026